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AUTHOR Omaggio, Alice; Birckbichler, Diane
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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a way to adapt foreign language instruction to individual learner needs and difficulties. The approach consists of two parts: (1) various sources of learner problems are identified and discussed briefly; and (2) over 50 remedial classroom activities are presented and described. These activities are designed to treat specific learner problems encountered when completing various classroom tasks relating to speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary learning, and grammar. The activities are classified in two ways. Each exercise is listed according to the processing demands of the task, and tasks are listed within the framework of a 6 X 8 matrix which specifies activities appropriate in each of 6 skill areas for learners experiencing one of 8 specific learning difficulties. The activities are easily adaptable to individual tutorial sessions, small-group work, or whole-class instruction. All of them are appropriate for use in daily lesson plans, but may also be easily assigned for homework or individual study. Tasks are appropriate for the teaching of any second language and are described in English. (Author/CFM)

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DIAGNOSING AND RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNER NEEDS

by

Alice Omaggio and Diane Birckbichler

(Paper presented at the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, April, 1977 and at the ACTFL Annual Meeting, November, 1977.)

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a way to adapt foreign language instruction to individual learner needs and difficulties. The approach consists of two parts: 1) Various sources of learner problems are identified and discussed briefly; 2) over 50 remedial classroom activities are presented and described. These activities are designed to treat specific learner problems encountered when completing various classroom tasks relating to speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary learning, and grammar. The activities are classified two ways: 1) Each exercise is listed according to the processing demands of the task; and 2) tasks are listed within the framework of a 6 X 8 matrix which specifies activities appropriate in each of 6 skill areas for learners experiencing one of 8 specific learning difficulties.

Activities are easily adaptable to individual tutorial sessions, small-group work, or whole-class instruction. All of them are appropriate for use in daily lesson plans, but may also be easily assigned for homework or individual study. Tasks are appropriate for the teaching of any second language and are described in English. (AUTHOR)

Many educators, aware of the importance of developing a curriculum that responds to the interests and needs of individual students, are beginning to explore more actively ways to identify learner differences. The foreign language profession shares this concern. We recognize that students come to the second language classroom with different interests and preferences, different first-language skills, and different learning styles in both the affective and cognitive domains. We also know that students will adopt their own learning strategies as they perform second-language tasks, even though a particular strategy may be ineffective or inefficient.

The following materials are designed to approach the problem of adapting instruction to individual learner needs in two ways:

1. Various SOURCES of learner problems are identified and discussed briefly.
2. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES are suggested to treat specific learning problems encountered in speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar tasks. The suggested learning activities are arranged two ways in this paper:
    a. They are classified according to the processing demands of the task (see pp. 4-5)
    b. They are listed within an 8 X 6 matrix which specifies which activities are appropriate in each skill area for learners experiencing a specific difficulty (p. 6).

These activities are easily adaptable to individual tutorial sessions or to small-group or whole-class instruction. In the latter case, teachers may choose to identify particular problems and incorporate appropriate activities into daily lesson plans. They may want to schedule small-group work for the purposes of remediating several specific problems during a given class period, or assign particular activities for homework.

SOURCES OF PROBLEMS*

Poor Memory

The student cannot remember information long enough to integrate the different elements of a spoken or written message into a meaningful and coherent whole. In addition, the student may have difficulty recalling specific vocabulary words, verb endings, noun markers, etc.

Lacks Flexibility

The student hesitates, stumbles over words, and is not able to find alternative means of expression. The performance of this student is often characterized by pauses in speech and by skimpy or brief compositions. The student may be what Guilford (1967) calls a convergent thinker, i.e., he has a tendency to remain within the strict limitations of a task or to focus on the production of a single right answer.

Too Impulsive

The impulsive student is generally characterized by a tendency to jump into a task without considering its various components. This student is not attentive to detail. The impulsive student does not know how to or is not willing to take the time to identify the distinctive or salient features of a learning task or segment of language. He may lack organizational skills. The impulsive student is not overly concerned with the adequacy or accuracy of a response and will often give the first answer he thinks of.

*Much of this information was synthesized from Hosenfeld (1975) and Speery (1972).

Too Reflective

The reflective student is too attentive to detail and discriminates so finely that he looses the general thread of a listening or reading passage. The student is overly concerned with the adequacy or accuracy of his responses and may think over alternatives before coming to a decision.

Field Dependent

The student lacks focusing skills, is too easily distracted by detail, and cannot distinguish relevant from irrelevant information. The field dependent student is easily frustrated by extraneous information and therefore has a tendency to make a task more complex than necessary.

Broad Categorizer

The broad categorizer has difficulty in making pertinent distinctions between categories. He has a tendency to overgeneralize, making rules about the second language that subsume many examples.

Narrow Categorizer

This student tends to create a rule for every example which detracts from his or her ability to make necessary and accurate generalizations. Consequently, the student is often lost in detail and has difficulty in forming concepts.

Low Tolerance of Ambiguity

The student gives up quickly when the task presents difficulty, doubt, or ambiguity. The student cannot hypothesize well and does not like to take risks.

ACTIVITIES

I. ANALYSIS: Activities that require the student to analyze samples of the foreign language--phonemes, morphemes, vocabulary items, etc. Analytical tasks might also include judging the meaningfulness of a given sample of the foreign language.

A. CLUE SEARCHING: Tasks requiring the student to locate certain features of the language and identify them properly.

1. Skimming Tasks
2. Syntactic Clue Searching
3. Semantic Clue Searching
4. Information Search
5. Who Said?
6. Reverse Semantic Cloze
7. Corrigez-moi

B. CATEGORIZING/CLUSTERING: Tasks requiring the student to list or otherwise isolate items of a certain grammatical or semantic category.

8. Category Listing
9. Card Sorting
10. Find Odd Word
11. Blank is to Blank
12. Error Categorizing
13. Discrimination Tasks
14. Segmenting

C. MEANINGFULNESS JUDGMENT/PROCESSING: Tasks requiring the student to judge the meaningfulness or acceptability of an utterance in the foreign language, to express an opinion, or to evaluate a series of statements.

15. Sentence Sense
16. Ranking
17. Either-Or Questions
18. Agree/Disagree

D. GENERAL ANALYTICAL TASKS: Tasks incorporating all of the above categories.

19. Making up questions
20. Dictation

II. SYNTHESIS: Activities requiring the student to go beyond analysis to recombine elements of the language and create an organized whole. Includes activities such as resumes and organizational tasks.

21. Résumé: Second Language
22. Résumé: English
23. Create a Title
24. Strip Story
25. Sentence Builder
26. Embedding
27. Scrambled Sentences
28. Dehydrated Sentences
29. Scrambled Composition

III. FLEXIBILITY: These activities ask students to find equivalencies, think of paraphrases, expand upon a cue or an idea, or make transformations. They will hopefully help students increase their flexibility with the language and thereby increase fluency.

30. Making Contradictions
31. Semantic Matching
32. Syntactic Matching
33. Oral Semantic Matching
34. Retell
35. Cartes de Conversation
36. Completion
37. Transformation Drills
38. Question Expansion
39. Creating with Visuals
40. Vocabulary Words: Create a Context
41. Rose Technique
42. Group Brainstorming
43. Jigsaw Puzzles
44. Be Wordy
45. Cue Insertion
46. Translation

IV. MAKING INFERENCES: In these tasks, students must analyze and synthesize information to make inferences about what a missing cue would be or what conclusions can be drawn given a certain piece of information.

47. Cloze adaptation
48. Contextual Guessing
49. Identifying Visuals
50. Style Shifting
51. Inferential Identification
52. Logical Continuation: Receptive
53. Logical Continuation: Productive

V. IMPROVING MEMORY: Tasks designed to help the student expand his capacities for remembering words, phrases, sentences, ideas in the foreign language.

53. Remembering Responses
54. Memory Games
58. Did You Hear?

SOURCE OF PROBLEM OR NEED	LEARNING TASK *(Numbers in the boxes refer to activities listed on pp. 7-18.)					
	List.	S pkg.	Read.	Writ.	Vocab.	Grammar
POOR MEMORY	2,3,4,5, 14,19,21, 22,24,41, 54,55,56	8,17,18, 34,35,36, 54,55	2,3,4,5, 19,21,22, 41,56	8,34,36, 54	3,8,9,10, 36,47,55	2,14,34, 36,47,55
LACKS FLEXIBILITY	31,32,41, 48,50	25,26,30, 33,34,38, 39,40,41, 42,43,44, 45,50	1,31,32, 47,48,50	25,26,30 34,36,38 39,40,41, 42,44,45 50	8,25,31 33,36,40, 42,43,48	25,32,34, 36
TOO IMPULSIVE	2,3,4,5, 7,13,14, 15,19,20, 21,22,49, 51,52	7,12,17, 18,34,35 41,53,54	2,3,4,5, 6,7,13, 15,16,19, 21,22,29 49,51,52	7,17,18, 20,27,28 29,41,46 53	3,6,7,9,10 13,15,16, 21,28,46, 49,52,53	2,6,13,15, 16,17,27, 28,46
TOO REFLECTIVE	4,23,31, 32,47,48	25,33,42, 44	1,4,23, 31,32, 47,48	25,42, 44	25,31,33 42,47,48	25,32,34 47
FIELD DEPENDENT	2,3,4,5, 7,14,19 21,22,23		1,2,3,4 5,6,7, 14,21,22 23,47, 48		1,3,4,7, 47,48	1,2,6,7, 14,47,48
BROAD CATEGORIZER	2,3,4,7, 10,11,13, 15	7, 8, 12	2,3,6, 9,10,11, 13,15	12,20 28	3,6,7,8,9 10,11,13, 15	2,6,8,11 12,13,15
NARROW CATEGORIZER	2,3,10, 31,32	8,33, 42	2,3,9, 10,31 32	31,32	8,31,33	32
LOW TOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY	4,15,47 48	25,33, 42	1,4, 15,47, 48	25,33, 42	25,33, 42,47, 48	32,47

LEARNING TASK

1. Skimming Tasks: Such tasks involve the rapid reading of a paragraph to obtain information pertaining to a specific idea. Students are given a list of specific questions to be answered in a given amount of time. (Rivers)

2. Syntactic Clue Searching: Students underline or tally morphemes of a certain category (such as verb endings, noun markers, and the like) in either a reading or listening passage. (Minn)

   Yo estoy en la universidad; estoy en un aula de la universidad. Esta aula es moderna y cómoda. La clase de español es en esta aula. Este joven es un estudiante. Es norteamericano. Se llama Daniel. Está al lado de la puerta, a la derecha. El cuaderno del joven está en la mesa. La cartera del estudiante está debajo de la silla.
   (Barcia)

3. Semantic Clue Searching: Students underline or tally lexical items of a given category (such as descriptive adjectives, adverbs of time and place, medical terms, terms pertaining to education, foods, humor, etc.). (Minn, pp 93-100)

   Je viens d'acheter une nouvelle voiture -- elle est rouge avec des sièges blancs et noirs et un tapis rouge. Elle n'est pas chère mais c'est une voiture rapide et confortable.

4. Information Search: Students are asked to read or listen to a passage with certain preposed questions in mind. They may be asked to identify the foreign language equivalent of an English word or to find an answer to a specific question.

Aujourd'hui c'est samedi. Jacques Marchand n'a pas de cours à l'université. Avec sa cousine, Francoise Laroux, il se promène au Quartier Latin. Le Quartier Latin est le quartier des étudiants. Il y a plusieurs facultés de l'université de Paris. Des Grandes Ecoles comme l'Ecole Polytechnique et l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts et beaucoup de lycees.... (Valdman)

5. Who Said? Students indicate which character from a reading passage made a particular statement. As a follow-up activity, students can be asked to find sentences or words from the reading that support their choices.

6. Reverse Semantic Cloze: Students are given a passage in which extraneous words have been inserted. Their task is to cross out the words that do not belong.

   You are looking for the some work and you find an apple announcement near in the newspaper. This ad tells you to write to the personnel umbrella department....

7. Corrigez-moi: Students listen to a story, paragraph, or sentence containing inappropriate words whose meanings could be confused with the appropriate contextual meaning. As they listen they are asked to notice the inappropriate word and suggest a substitution. (Rivers)

   I put on my sleep. (slip)
   In my living room I have a lamp, a sofa, and two green armpits. (armchairs)
   Ce matin, j'ai très femme. (faim)
   Donde está Pablo? Está en su cartero. (cuarto)

8. Category Listing: Students create a list of words belonging to a given category (such as words that pertain to sports, a list of fruits or vegetables, a list of items in the classroom that could be put in a suitcase, etc.).

9. Card sorting: Students are given vocabulary words written on note cards and are asked to sort them according to the category to which they belong, such as sports, clothing, foods. They can also further subdivide a given category, such as team versus individual sports, summer versus winter clothing, etc.

10. Find Odd Word: Students are given a short list of vocabulary words. All the words are related except one. The student's task is to indicate which word does not belong on the list.

nature	les sports	madre
sunshine	le football	padre
authority	le tennis	criada
camping	l'hotel	hermano

11. Blank is to Blank: Students are given a pair of words that are related in some way (such as antonyms, synonyms, superordinates, etc.). They are then given a third word and are asked to find an appropriate match.

E.g. Tooth: Dentist Hair: _____ (Barber)

12. Error Categorizing: After the teacher has returned a corrected composition, students are asked to list their mistakes, putting them into categories such as spelling errors, tense errors, vocabulary mistakes,etc.

13. Discrimination Tasks: Students pick the correct word from a list of words that are similar in form or meaning.

E.g. I went to the _____.

a. widow
b. window
c. winding
d. willow

(Jarvis)

14. Segmenting: Students listen to sentences and isolate their component parts. They may be asked to identify the actor in each sentence, the object, or the action. At a more advanced level, they may be required to identify main or subordinate clauses, such as relative or conditional clauses.

The girl who is standing by the window is my sister.
The little old lady in tennis shoes was bitten by a big dog.

15. Sentence Sense: In this activity the student's task is to judge whether a sentence is meaningful. If the sentence is not meaningful, the student changes it so that it makes sense.

The old man sat quietly on the ceiling.
The loudly person made a lot of noise.

16. Ranking: Students are given a list of related vocabulary words (such as a list of foods, animals, gifts, etc.) and are asked to rank them according to their personal preferences.

17. Either-or Questions: Students answer a question in which two or three alternatives are provided. Their task is to choose one of the alternatives in answering the question.

18. Agree/Disagree: Students are asked to agree or disagree with a given statement. If they disagree, they reword the statement so that it represents their own ideas.

19. Making up Questions: Students read or listen to a passage and subsequently make up questions pertaining to the content.

20. Dictation: Students write sentences dictated to them by the teacher. The sentences may also be on tape.

21. Résumé: Second Language: Students are given a list of sentences and asked to choose those that best summarize a reading or listening passage.

22. Résumé in English: Students read or listen to a passage in the second language and write a short resume of the content in English.

23. Create a Title: Students are given several titles from which they choose the one that best summarizes the reading or listening passage. They can also be asked to create a title or titles on their own. They might also write a short moral to a story in the second language.

24. Strip story: Each student in a small group of 4 or 5 is given a sentence from a story which they are asked to memorize without letting anyone else see it. Each student tells the group his sentence and the group tries to reconstruct the story as quickly as possible. (Gilson)

25. Sentence Builder: Students create sentences by combining words or phrases from different columns.

A bas	la société
Arrêtez	les cigarettes
Cherchez	la guerre
Faites	le sexe
Toujours	les femmes
Demandez	l'amour
etc.	etc.
?	?

(Jarvis)

26. Embedding: Students are given a short sentence and asked in turn to add clauses, adjectives, adverbs, etc. to the sentence, making it progressively longer.

E.g. The woman is blond.
The woman who is standing over there is blond.
The woman who is standing over there by the window is blond.
The woman who is standing over there by the window that is open is blond. Etc.

27. Scrambled Sentences: Students reorder scrambled sentences into their normal syntactic order.

28. Dehydrated Sentences: Students are given parts of a sentence and are asked to fill out the rest of it, adding proper function words, verb endings, etc.

29. Scrambled Composition: Students reorder sentences into a meaningful and coherent paragraph. The paragraph can be based on a story already read or a recombination of words and structure with which the students are familiar. Student compositions can also be used for this activity.

30. Making Contradictions: Students respond to a statement by making contradictory statements.

E.g. Teacher: "Cinderella's childhood was happy."
Student 1: "No, it was very unhappy."
Student 2: "She had to do all the hard work."

(Stanislawczyk and Yavener)

31. Semantic Matching: In Column A, students are given a set of sentences; they are asked to choose from Column B equivalent or near-equivalent sentences.

E.g.

Column A	Column B
1. I hate cooking.	a. Is life in Montreal pleasant?
2. You don't have any tact.	b. He's not rich.
3. Do you like Montreal?	c. I don't like to prepare dinner.
4. He doesn't have any money.	d. He's not very diplomatic.

32. Syntactic Matching: This activity is very similar to the one described above except that the focus is on grammatical transformations.

E.g. The dog bit the cat.
The cat was bitten by the dog.

33. Oral Semantic Matching: In this activity Student A has a list of sentences which he reads to his partner. The partner has a list of sentences equivalent in meaning but arranged in a different order. As Student A reads his sentences, Student B reads aloud the sentence on his list with the equivalent meaning.

34. Retell: Students take a message either in person or on the phone for someone else. Their task is to transmit that message as accurately as possible to the third party.

35. Cartes de conversation: Students are divided into pairs and ask each other questions listed on a conversation or interview card.

(Bonin and Birckbichler)

Card 1

Ask x.... what sports s/he likes
if s/he plays basketball
if s/he prefers ski or golf
if s/he plays tennis

Card 2

Ask x.... if s/he is athletic
s/he likes basketball
if s/he plays golf
if s/he prefers tennis or football

36. Completion: Students complete in a meaningful way a sentence or a paragraph.

E.g. When I'm tired, I _____.
When I'm afraid, I _____.
I am ashamed when I _____.

37. Transformation Drills: Grammatical exercises that ask students to make transformations, substitutions, and the like can be assigned to students working alone or in groups.

38. Question Expansion: Given a question (e.g., "Do you like sports?") Students create additional questions relating to the same topic. (e.g. "What's your favorite sport? Do you like to watch sports on T.V.? Do you prefer team or individual sports?")

39. Creating with Visuals: Students create original captions for a series of visuals from a magazine or cartoon strip. They might also be asked to create a composition based on a series of visuals or cartoons.

(Boylan and Omaggio, Rivers)

40. Vocabulary words: Create a Context: Students are given a short list of idioms or vocabulary words and create an original story or paragraph using all the words on the list. They may do this task alone or in a group.

41. Rose technique: Students are placed in pairs or in larger groups. Each student has a blank piece of paper. He listens to his partner or the group leader who has a picture to describe (the teacher can provide the picture or students can choose their own). As his partner describes the picture, the student tries to draw a rough duplicate according to the description he hears.

(adapted from Rose, Suzanne et al.)

42. Group Brainstorming: Students are given statements and are asked to find as many ways to express the same idea in different words.

E.g. Teacher: Ernst is unhappy today.
Student 1: He is miserable.
Student 2: He is not happy.
Student 3: He is sad.
Student 4: He is not ecstatic.
etc.

43. Jigsaw Puzzles: Students form groups of four or five and are given cards, each with a word on it. They describe their word in the foreign language to the others in the group without actually using it. When all students have described their word successfully, the students take the first letter of each word and see what new word the letters spell out. (Students might also have to describe parts of a room and all the words together are considered to decide which room of the house has been described.) (Omaggio)

44. Be Wordy: Students are given a topic sentence or a series of topic sentences and fill out the rest of the paragraph.

45. Cue Insertion: Students expand each sentence of their original compositions by adding additional information (such as expanding on the information that is already in the paragraph, adding descriptive words, etc.). The teacher can also give appropriate cue words.

46. Translation: Students are given sentences or paragraphs to translate from their native language into the second language or vice-versa.

47. Cloze adaptation: Students fill in the blanks of a paragraph by choosing from options given or by providing appropriate words themselves.

48. Contextual Guessing: Students are given a paragraph in which new vocabulary words have been underlined. They must try to guess the meaning of each new word from the context.

49. Identifying Visuals: Students are asked to identify the object or scene described orally or in writing by choosing the appropriate visual from a selection of 3 or 4 pictures. They may also order visuals based on a paragraph that they read or hear.

50. Style Shifting: After reading or listening to a short dialogue from which the names of the characters have been deleted, students identify who the speakers might have been. Students might also create such dialogues orally or in writing. (Jacobson)

E.g. A: I didn't expect you here at school. thought you were going shopping.

B: Your dad will be back today.

A: Oh, do you suppose he'll let me borrow the car tonight?

51. Inferential Identification: Students identify which character from a dialogue, short story, play, etc. might have made a statement. The actual statement is not made in the original text but is reflective of the character's personality.

52. Logical Continuation: Receptive Students are given a pair of sentences either orally or in writing and are asked to indicate whether or not the second sentence follows logically from the first.

E.g. John never goes out on weeknights.

He went to the movies Tuesday.

53. Logical Continuation: Productive Students read a statement or a paragraph and then produce a sentence that logically follows.

54. Remembering Responses: After students have answered a series of personalized questions based on the themes and structures of the lesson, members of the class are asked to recall some of the responses that were given.

55. Memory Games: Memory games can focus on vocabulary words or grammatical structures. Typical memory games include chain sentences or stories, "whisper-down-the-lane", (or "telephone"), etc.

56. Did You Hear? Students listen to a short narrative. They then hear a series of sentences; some of which were in the text. Their task is to separate the sentences they heard from ones they did not hear.

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